Translation of the Call to Prayer

Allah is Most Great, Allah is Most Great;
Allah is Most Great, Allah is Most Great.

I testify that there is no god but Allah;
I testify that there is no god but Allah.

I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah;
I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

Come to prayer! Come to prayer!
Come to salvation! Come to salvation!

Allah is Most Great! Allah is Most Great!
There is no god but Allah.

The cycle of the prayer times, which are based on the rhythms of the natural world, provide a framework for living and a foundation for those moments in life that occasionally lift us out of this time/space continuum and allow us to draw close to the Divine Being.

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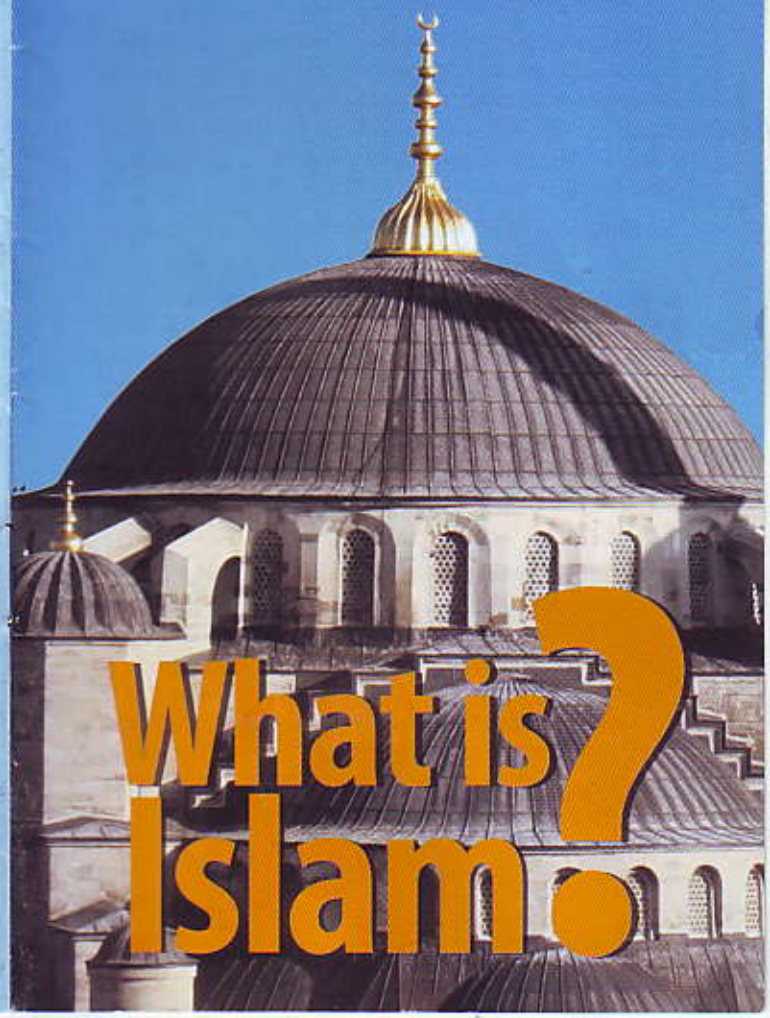
Free Pamphlet

The Qur'an: The Final Revelation

Prophet Muhammed (p.b.u.h)

Islam, Prayer and the Mosque



What is Islam?

What is Islam?

The word "Islam" is an Arabic one meaning peace and submission. A practicing Muslim strives to submit whole-heartedly to God, thereby achieving peace in this life as well as in the afterlife. "Mohammedanism" is a misnomer for Islam and offends its very spirit.

Islam is a religion based on revelation that believes in the One God and the guidance revealed by God to the prophets. The prophets of Islam include ones such as Abraham, Moses, Solomon, and Jesus: hence Islam is not a new religion but the final culmination and fulfillment of the same basic truth that God revealed through all His prophets to every nation (Qur'an 3: 84).

What Muslims Believe?

1. One God: Muslims believe in the One, Unique, Incomparable, Merciful God, the Sole Creator, Sustainer and Cherisher of the Universe. Muslims prefer to use the Arabic name for God, "Allah", because it has no plural, feminine or diminutive that could be associated with idolatry (i.e. gods, goddesses or semi-gods).

2. The Angels: Muslims believe that Allah created the angels such that they cannot commit sins and have no gender.

3. The Prophets: With the belief that Allah sent His messengers and prophets to all people, Muslims faithfully accept Biblical prophets mentioned in the Qur'an including Adam, Ishmael, Isaac, Moses, David, and Jesus (peace be upon them all). All prophets were human beings like us who, as chosen examples for their people, committed no grave sin. Muslims accept Jesus as a prophet, believe in his virgin birth, and respect him very much. His name is mentioned in the Qur'an almost a hundred times.

4. The Books: To believe in the Holy Books of Allah that were sent before and in the Qur'an as the final words from Allah is a pillar of the Muslim's faith. The Qur'an was revealed to the last prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon him), through the Archangel Gabriel. It confirmed and finalized all previous revelations that were sent to humankind through Allah's messengers. The Qur'an is a miracle in many senses including that its meanings still apply in modern times and the verses of the Qur'an are never found to contradict modern science.

5. Fate and Divine Decree: A Muslim believes in Divine Decree, which relates to the ultimate power of Allah. It means Allah is the Omniscience, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent. He has knowledge and power to execute His plans. Allah is not indifferent to this world. Allah is the Wise, Just, and Loving, and whatever He does has wisdom though we may sometimes fail to fully understand it.

6. Resurrection: The following verse explains the significance of believing in the principles of faith including the Last Day:

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards east or west; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the Allah-fearing." (Qur'an 2: 177).

What are the Five Pillars of Islam?

1. Shahadah (Testimony)

There are five pillars of Islam, the first being the declaration of faith, he shahadah, a simple formula that all the faithful pronounce: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." These words are to be uttered with sincere conviction and under no coercion. The significance of this testimony is the belief that the only purpose of life is to serve and obey God, and this is achieved through following the example of Prophet Muhammad, the messenger to all human beings until the Day of Judgment.

2. Salah (Five Daily Prayers)

Daily prayers are offered five times a day as a duty towards Allah. They strengthen and enliven the belief in Allah and inspire man to a higher morality. They purify the heart and prevent temptation towards wrong doings and evils. Male Muslims are greatly encouraged to perform their five daily prayers in the mosque in congregation. Female Muslims are free to pray where it is most convenient. A mosque, in its most basic form, is simply a clean area designated for prayers. Mosques throughout the world have taken on various architectural forms reflecting local cultures. They range from detached pavilions in China and elaborate courtyards in India to massive domes in Turkey and glass and steel structures in the United States.

3. Sawm (Fasting)

Muslims keep Ramadan, the fasting month, not only by abstaining from food, drink, and marital intercourse from dawn to sunset but also from evil intentions and desires. It teaches love, sincerity, and devotion. It develops a sound social conscience, patience, unselfishness, and will power. It also helps the wealthy to understand the difficulties of those who suffer from hunger.

4. Zakah (Purification of Wealth)

Islamic worship is not limited to the spiritual realm alone. Material obligations apply to those who can afford it. Zakah is the annual payment of 2.5% of one's net savings and commercial assets held for a year as a religious duty and a purification of one's wealth. The sum is to be spent directly on poorer sections of the community. Muslims are required to help the poor, orphans, and the needy by providing them with at least a fixed amount of money in order to facilitate their lives in an attempt to get rid of inequality. Islam always encourages Muslims to share their material opportunities with those less fortunate. However, the minimum of this sharing is to give zakah.

5. Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca)

This duty is to be performed once in a lifetime if one can afford it financially and physically. Over the last 1,400 years, the Islamic miracle of real brotherhood of all races and nations has been seen in action as Muslims gather for pilgrimage, Hajj, annually in the sacred city of Mecca where the House of Allah, the Ka'bah, is located. As the only pilgrimage site and the direction to be faced for the five daily prayers, the Ka'bah, an ancient cubic shaped building dating from Abraham's time, is circumambulated now by around three million Muslims in white gowns each year during Hajj.

Salvation in Islam

In Islam, every human being is born sinless: there is no original sin. Each person is responsible for his own acts, and no one shall bear the burden of others (Qur'an 6: 164). Each person is inspired with the knowledge of Allah and naturally inclined toward Islam before birth. It is therefore our responsibility to seek the guidance of Allah and keep our hearts pure from corruption. Allah is the judge of all, and no one has the right to grant salvation or dictate punishment except Him.

The Qur'an: The Final Revelation

The Qur'an is the sacred book of Muslims who believe its complete text came through revelation. Each word of it was revealed in Arabic by Allah (God) to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the Archangel Gabriel over a span of twenty-three years in the 7th century. The revelation of the Qur'an began when the Prophet was forty years old. It consists of around 600 pages, 114 chapters, and 6,236 verses. The length of chapters varies with the longest chapter having 286 verses while the shortest one has only three.

Given that the Prophet was an unlettered man, his early followers eagerly memorized and recorded each new revelation as it was revealed. By the time the Prophet passed away, the Qur'an had been completed and many had memorized its entirety. Within two years after the death of the Prophet, the first caliph, Abu Bakr, compiled the Qur'an into a manuscript which became the basis for the authorized editions that were distributed to each Muslim province during the rule of Uthman, the third caliph. Remarkably, a few of those early manuscripts have been preserved and can still be viewed in museums today. Thus, the Qur'an's historical authenticity can be verified, and its text has been so carefully preserved that only one authorized version (in Arabic) exists.

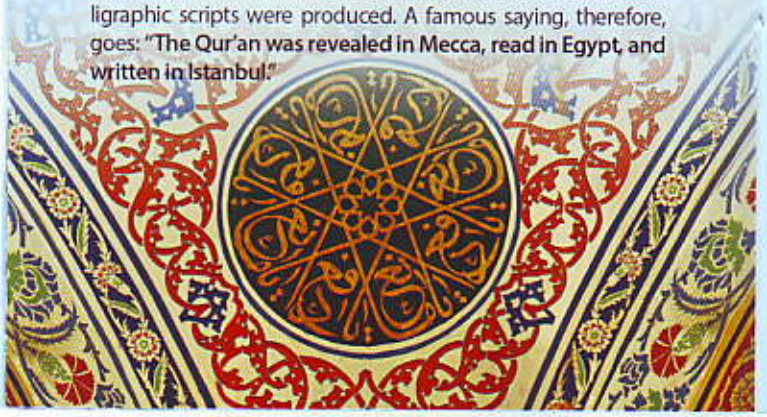
Appropriately, the word Qur'an means recitation, and the first verse of the Qur'an to be revealed to Prophet Muhammad was a command, "Read in the name of your Lord, the Creator...." Whereas earlier Scriptures had been written and passed down by elite circles of priests and scribes usually long after the death of the religion's founder; such a directive to Muhammad who, like most people of the time, could neither read nor write, marked the beginning of a new age in human communication, learning, and development. Consequently, Muslims believe in the original form of all the revealed books which are mentioned in the Qur'an: the Torah of Moses, Psalms of David, and the Gospels of Jesus. The Qur'an also mentions Scrolls of Abraham.

Since Moses' contemporaries were excellent in magic, his major miracle was to defeat the best magicians of Egypt in his day. Jesus' contemporaries were recognized as skillful physicians; therefore, his miracle was to cure incurable diseases. The Arabs, the contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad, were known for their eloquence and magnificent poetry. Accordingly, Prophet Muhammad's major miracle was the Qur'an, the equivalent of which the whole legion of Arab poets and orators could not produce, despite the repeated challenge from the Qur'an itself:

"Say, if the whole of mankind... were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support." **(Qur'an 17: 88).**

The Qur'an is revered by Muslims as being God's final Scripture. Its verses are and have been lovingly recited, memorized, and implemented by Muslims of every nationality ever since its revelation. It is the verses of the Qur'an that Muslims read during their five daily prayers. The faithful ones are inspired, consoled, and often moved to tears by its eloquence and poetic imagery.

For the past fourteen centuries, Muslims from all over the world have written the Qur'anic verses in various beautiful calligraphic forms, which were mainly produced and perfected by the Ottoman Turks. In fact, it was in Istanbul that the finest calligraphic scripts were produced. A famous saying, therefore, goes: **"The Qur'an was revealed in Mecca, read in Egypt, and written in Istanbul."**



In addition to its beauty, the Qur'an contains many verses which accurately describe natural phenomenon in various fields such as astronomy, geology, and embryology. Scientists have found its descriptions to be inexplicably valid for a book dating from the 7th century. Naturally, therefore, he conflict that emerged in Europe during the Middle Ages between faith and reason, religion and science, never arose in Islam. The Qur'an repeatedly encourages people to reflect and use their intelligence in many verses. Even though it is not a science textbook, its verses direct humans to reflect on the glory of God while highlighting the wonders of nature or the lessons of history.

Muslims believe that it is a living revelation for a modern age, which allows it to reveal itself afresh with passing time. Since it is a very special message from the Creator to humanity, one who wonders about the purpose of life and meaning of existence will find it to be a guide par excellence. The opening chapter (al-Fatihah), which is described as the essence of the Qur'an, reads:

"All praise and thanks are due to God, the Lord and Sustainer of all the worlds. Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Master of the Day of Judgment. You alone do we worship. And You alone do we ask for help. Guide us to the straight way. The way of those whom You have favored. Not those who deserve Your anger. Nor of those who go astray."

The Qur'an's main message is to call people to turn to the Source of all being and the Giver of life and to serve Him with a pure heart, free of idolatry or superstition. It rejects the concept of salvation or special privilege based on ethnicity, race, or color. Spiritual salvation is to be achieved by an attempt to make amends for one's sins and a sincere intention not to repeat one's mistakes in the future. There is no official priesthood in Islam, and the "imam" is simply a knowledgeable prayer-leader; one's sins need only be confessed directly to the Creator.

The Qur'an presents itself as guidance for mankind as a whole. It is not for any particular people, place, or period in time. It relates its arguments to basic values of faith and ethics while assessing certain experiences of nations in history. It does not require people to believe blindly, and it is addressed to "those who are conscious of God, and those who use their reason." (Qur'an 30: 24). It asks humans to think about themselves and the existence; the earth and mountains; clouds and sky; the sun, moon, and planets in their orbits; and the alternations of night and day. It asks us to reflect upon our own life. It asks us to contemplate on the seeds we sow, the water we drink, the food we eat, and all the other innumerable signs of creation. Throughout, the Qur'an stresses knowledge and reason as the valid way to faith and God-consciousness. It says: *"Only those of the servants of God who possess knowledge are the ones who truly stand in awe of Him."* (Qur'an 35: 28)

Overall, the Qur'an enjoins good deeds and prohibits evil ones by introducing humans to a straight way of life. It also provides answers to such basic existential questions as the hereafter and the meaning of life. It offers humans a framework for their own existence, environment, society, and the whole creation.

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him)

Who is Muhammad?

In 570 AD, a child was born to a noble family via the prophetic lineage of Ishmael, son of Abraham, in Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula. His name was Muhammad, "the praised one." He was orphaned at an early age; hence he understood the plight of orphans and the under-privileged. Muhammad grew to be a young man with an outstanding character. God Almighty protected him from the evils of the Arab way of life such as drinking alcohol, fornicating, theft etc. He was known as al-Amin, the trustworthy, for people entrusted him with their valuables. Even before Islam, Muhammad was interested in the problems of his society and sought the establishment of virtue in the society, such as the prevention of injustices being perpetrated against foreign traders.

Prophethood

At the age of 40, he received his first revelation from Allah during the ninth month of the lunar calendar, Ramadan, delivered by the Archangel Gabriel. The first message revealed to him was, "Read/recite in the name of your Lord, Who created you!" Hence Islam, the way of life Muhammad was sent to teach, emphasized the acquisition and the dissemination of knowledge since its inception.

Over a period of twenty-three years, he continued to receive revelations. This message named the "Qur'an" by Allah, is addressed to all humanity and has a basic message; belief in the oneness of Allah, the Creator; His angels; His Messengers; His Books; The Day of Judgment; and His Divine Decree over all of His creation.

In the first thirteen years of his prophethood, he invited people to abandon idol worship and to become a community of monotheists. The first believer was the Prophet's wife, Khadijah, who is respected as the "mother" of Muslims. Unfortunately, as he delivered this message, the Meccans saw him as a danger to their way of life, idol worshipping. As he called for the rights of the weak, he drew the anger and wrath of the strong. He became the champion to the poor and oppressed.

In order to persuade him to abandon his message, all sorts of schemes like bribery, torture and banishment were used. Despite all these abuses, none of his followers deserted Islam. In 622 AD, Muhammad received a command from God to migrate to Medina, a city north of Mecca. This event was so momentous that the Islamic calendar begins with this migration (hijrah). In Medina, Muslims became a cohesive society. More people from every religion, tribe and race embraced Islam. People from all parts were affected by the outstanding character and grace of the Prophet.

Ten years after the hijrah, Prophet Muhammad returned to Mecca with an army of 10,000 men under the strict order that no blood was to be spilt, no revenge was to be taken. He respectfully rode into Mecca on the back of his camel bowing so that his head nearly rested on her neck. Upon his entering the city, he told its inhabitant: "I say to you what the Prophet Joseph said to his brothers, 'This day, no reproach be cast on you. May Allah forgive you. You are free."

The following year in the pilgrimage season, he gave his farewell sermon in which he said:

"We have put the ways of ignorance behind us now. We must drop all ties with usury. There is to be justice, and no one should ever be oppressed; all men are equal regardless of black and white, rich or poor, Arab or non-Arab. The thing that distinguishes us from one another is piety; there shall be no more paganism..."

During this time, the following verse was revealed to him: *"This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favor on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion..."* (Qur'an 5: 3).

Prophet Muhammad died in 632 and buried in Medina, Saudi Arabia.

His Moral Characteristics

He was very modest and never spoke with foul words, and when he was in the presence of obscenity, he would leave and rebuke it. He never raised his voice or reacted to a bad deed inflicted upon him with another bad deed. He was always pardoning and forgiving. He never took revenge on anyone who oppressed him. He never broke any of God's commandments. When faced with two options, he always preferred the easier one as long as it did not go against God's will. He was such a modest person that he would help cook and clean the house. He only talked about that which concerned him. He treated people kindly and made them feel easy in his company. He was generous with whatever he had. He was very balanced in his character. If he sat with someone, he would never leave before his guest left him first. If someone gave him a hard time, he was patient with them. Hence everyone liked his company. He was very affectionate, never harsh or greedy. He never accepted praise except what was reasonable.

Reformation of His Society

Prophet Muhammad brought about many changes in his society:

- He was a champion for equal rights of women; he removed the husband's "ownership" of the wife. He established the woman's right to own property as well as her right to inheritance. He defended her right of choosing or refusing a man for marriage.
- He became a protector of orphans; he established proper treatment for them. A common saying of his was, "The best home is a home in which an orphan is well treated, and the worst home is a home in which an orphan is mistreated." He forbade the misuse of the inheritance of the orphan, ensuring that they would receive what was rightfully theirs when they came of age.
- He became an environmentalist. For example, it was his practice to assign a man from among his companions to collect all of the trash at camping sights when they were journeying.
- He forbade the overloading of any beast of burden. He preached merciful treatment for all animals.
- He taught his followers to love and respect the nature around them and instructed his followers to plant even on the Day of Doom. He forbade the destruction of nature, especially trees, even during times of war.
- He was concerned with social health. He helped eliminate the use of alcohol, intoxicants, slavery, and gambling.

Islam, Prayer, and the Mosque

As you walk into a mosque, you may be impressed by the architecture and the calligraphic decoration based on the Arabic script or by the light and the spaciousness of this place where Muslims have gathered for centuries for the five daily prayers and other religious services. The Friday prayer, the one that is optional for women and obligatory for men to perform in the mosque, is a weekly congregational prayer which includes a sermon (khutbah) by the imam addressing social issues as well as directing Muslims to a virtuous life. The imam, for example, recites the following verse from the Qur'an at the end of every sermon: "Surely Allah enjoins the doing of justice and the doing of good (to others) and the giving to the kinsfolk, and He forbids indecency and evil and rebellion; He admonishes you that you may be mindful." (Qur'an 16: 90)

This small brochure will hopefully answer questions you may have about the religion of Islam, how it began, how it is practised, the significance of prayer, and the role of the mosque. Hopefully, it will also assist you in feeling a sense of peace under the dome of the mosque that has traditionally provided a space for communal prayer.

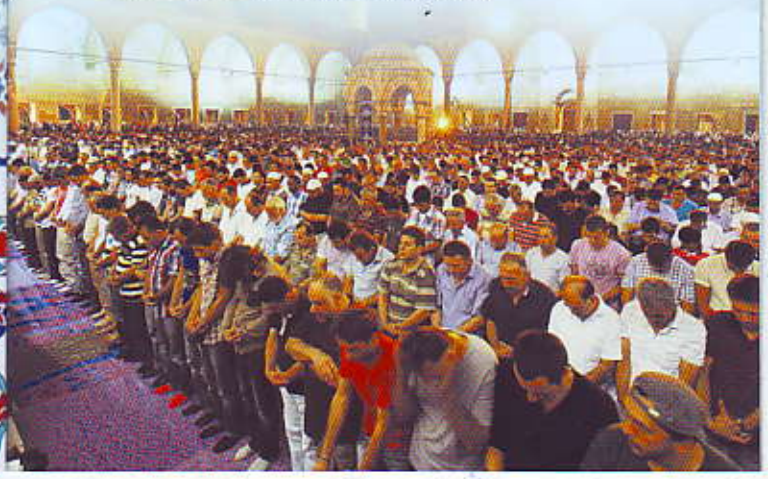
In Islam, it is not necessary to be in a mosque to pray since God is not confined to a building, as Prophet Muhammad said, "The whole earth is a mosque." But the traditional mosque consists of a domed building and a minaret from where the call to prayer is performed. There is no altar just the simple space to pray together and often a niche (mihrab) to indicate the direction of Mecca which the faithful face in prayer.

Islam

Around the year 610 AD, a man named Muhammad was spending time alone in the cave of Hira where he regularly retreated from the bustle of the busy trading town of Mecca to contemplate the mysteries of life. Muhammad was known as "the trustworthy" amongst his friends and family because he was always sincere and honest in his dealings with others. It was toward the end of the lunar month of Ramadan, during the night that is now known and celebrated as the Night of Power, when the revelations of the Qur'an began to be transmitted through Archangel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad. He continued to receive these revelations for twenty-three years. The verses were memorized and written down, which is the same Book that Muslims read today.

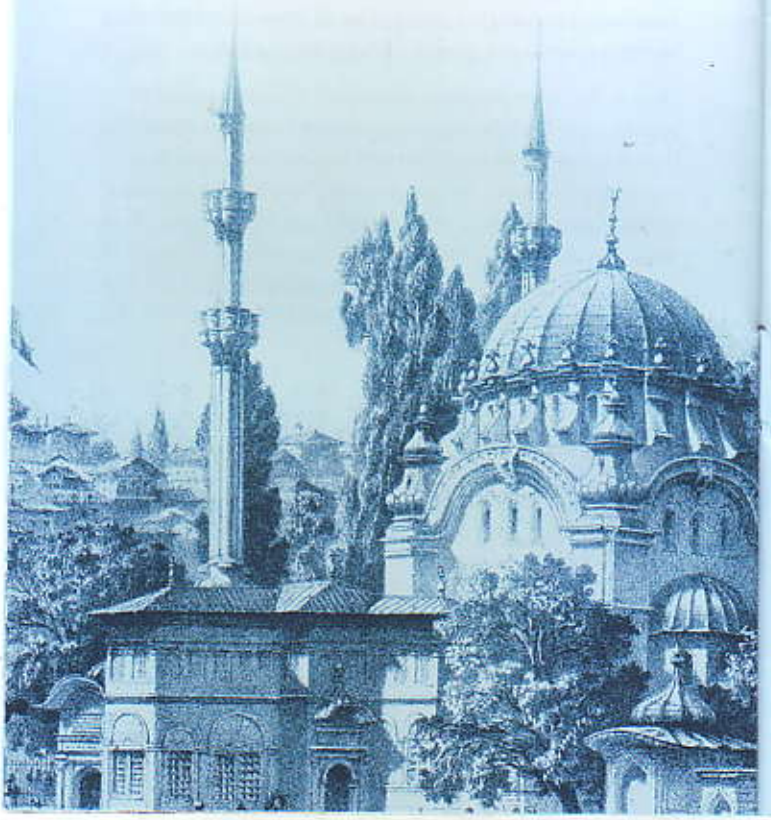
In addition to the Qur'an, Muslims have the recordings of the Prophet's lifetime and practices (Sunnah). This includes such things as the manner of praying and ablution, the details on how to perform the pilgrimage, and many other practices that illustrate the belief in one God. There are also the sayings and acts of the Prophet as witnessed by the people of the time that have been transmitted and recorded. These are known as hadith and serve as a guide on how to live the faith.

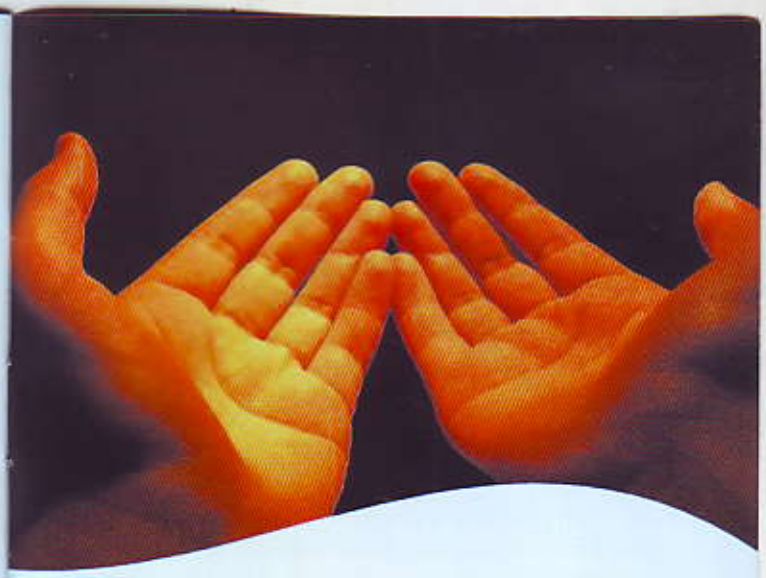
Islam is the last of the three Abrahamic religions preceded by Judaism and Christianity. It is a religion based on revelation that believes in the One God and the guidance revealed by Him to the prophets. The prophets of Islam include Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Jesus, many others, and Muhammad, all of whom have been sent to bring the message to humankind of their creation by God and their eventual return to Him. The Oneness of God (tawhid) is central to Islam.



The Five Pillars of Islam

The first half of the profession of faith, the shahadah, which Muslims recite very often in their prayers, reads, "There is no god but Allah." This is a declaration of the belief in the absolute oneness of God. In the second half, it declares, "And Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." Anyone who declares the shahadah is a Muslim, even if s/he does not observe other duties. This is the first of the five pillars of Islam. The other four are the obligatory prayer five times a day; the giving of charity; fasting from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan; and the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime for those who have the means to undertake the journey. These are the ritual obligations of Islam, each of which has an inner spiritual effect for the sincere ones: therefore, faith and sincerity are essential components of these acts. Additionally, Muslims make personal prayers known as dua.





Prayer and the Call to Prayer

The five daily prayers performed by Muslims are central to the practice of Islam. After performing ablutions, a physical preparation in which such parts of the body as the face, arms and feet are washed, the prayer begins and includes set movements and recitations from the Qur'an spoken in the original Arabic. One cycle of prayer is called a rakah, and varying numbers of rakah are performed for each of the prayer times.

Prayer involves body, mind, and soul in an act of remembrance and surrender amidst the business of every day affairs. It is a few minutes apart from the concerns of the day that can infuse other activities with a sense of peace and purpose. Jews pray standing, Christians pray kneeling whereas Islamic prayer covers these positions as well as prostration. As for the congregational setting of prayer, Muslims stand in line shoulder to shoulder which symbolizes the equality of all believers.

The timing of the prayers is calculated according to the movement of the sun: for example, the noon prayer time begins when the sun has just passed its zenith at one's location. Therefore, it changes with seasons according to where one is in the world. Thus, there is not even a single moment without a prayer being made throughout the world. To remind people of the prayer times, the call to prayer (adhan), is recited in Arabic aired from the minaret. This is done by the muezzin who is chosen for the task based on recitation skills and good character. The very first muezzin was Bilal, an Ethiopian black Muslim, known for his beautiful voice.